Education Development Fund Report for 1985-86

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This is the first of several reports that will describe the progress of the Education Development Fund (EDF).

As you browse through these pages, you will quickly realize that the educators in our province have worked very hard and with great dedication to enrich student learning. This enrichment has occured by creating new programs, making school buildings more efficient, and acquiring modern learning resources.

As Saskatchewan schools continue to use the EDF program to its fullest potential, I am confident that our province will be rewarded with an education system and graduates second to none.

Yours sincerely,

Lorne H. Hepworth

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Introduction

The 1980's have been a period of renewal for education in Saskatchewan. Through the Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction, Saskatchewan residents were given the opportunity to voice their ideas about what schools should be teaching and how they should go about it. The final report of this committee, *Directions,* presented several recommendations for change, many of which have been implemented.

It was clear from the public consultations leading up to the *Directions* report that the people of Saskatchewan held high expectations for schools. These expectations stemmed from the recognition that the future will be a time of uncertainty marked by rapid technological change. To meet this challenge, today's students will need highly refined written, numerical, and computing skills. Emphasis was placed upon the need for schools to teach students to be critical thinkers and problem solvers. In addition, Saskatchewan residents wanted schools to build student self-confidence and encourage an attitude of tolerance and acceptance of others.

If these expectations were to be met, new approaches and new initiatives would be required. In the April 10, 1985 Budget Speech, additional resources were allocated for this purpose. The Minister of Finance announced a five-year priority commitment to the K-12 education system. This created the Education Development Fund (EDF).

Overview

The Education Development Fund was intended to finance new initiatives for educational improvement. It was established in the 1985-86 fiscal year and allocated 10 million dollars. That figure was increased to $35 million for 1986-87, with a reaffirmation to provide additional funds in each of the subsequent three years. During the winter of 1987, the original five-year priority commitment to the fund was extended another five years to 1995.

The EDF program was designed to be sufficiently broad to allow for local initiatives and autonomy, while at the same time ensuring that provincial priorities are met in a co-ordinated fashion. There are several principles which provide for operation of the fund:

- Initiatives must recognize and facilitate the meeting of local needs, priorities and governance, while accommodating provincial priorities.
- Existing accountability mechanisms must be used to ensure effective utilization of funds.
- Initiatives should improve the efficiency of the educational system, while recognizing the reality of an increasing scarcity of resources.
- Initiatives at the provincial and local level should be consistent with the blueprint for educational improvement outlined in *Directions,* the report of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction.
- Boards of education should develop educational goals and long-range plans.

Allocation of funds were made available under three major categories:

Learning Resources: library and resource centre acquisitions, computers and other technology purchases

Efficiency Measures: upfront expenditures for efficiency efforts resulting in the same or better service for fewer dollars

Program Improvement Initiatives: efforts to improve educational program quality in several areas of provincial priority such as development of basic skills, preparation for life, dropout prevention, education of gifted students, community involvement and overall school effectiveness

It was intended that the Education Development Fund continue to provide support for major improvement efforts, rather than maintenance of existing programs. Local boards of education carry the major responsibility to ensure that provincial priorities are met and that local needs are addressed. School divisions determine local priorities within the provincial guidelines and prepare plans of action.

Saskatchewan Education strongly encouraged the development by each school division of a comprehensive plan for the analysis of needs, and the development of a long-term plan for meeting those needs.

The process of project submissions began with initial discussions at the local level between school division directors and regional directors of education. The outcome of these discussions was a draft outline of the proposal. A formal proposal was then submitted to the regional director of education for final approval.

As soon as project applications received final approval, the regional director of education took the necessary action to release an initial payment, usually covering 50 per cent of the project amount. Interim payments were also available in the case of long-range projects or projects involving substantial expenditures. Upon completion of the project, the school division forwarded a copy of the final report to the regional director and final payment was then released.

Provincial Summary

For the 1985-86 budget year, school divisions were allocated $9,140,106.00 from the Education Development Fund.

Table 1
EDF Allocations 1985-86

Area	Dollars Budget	Per Cent Budget
Learning Resources	2,235,843	25
Efficiency	1,774,588	19
Program Initiative	5,129,675	56
Total	**9,140,106**	**100**

During the 1985-86 budget year, 714 projects were approved for funding by the regional offices of Saskatchewan Education.

Saskatchewan Education has received 528 final reports. The remaining projects are ongoing and will submit their final reports in future reporting years.

Table 2 presents a summary of the different focal points for the projects. Although there were 528 projects, the number of project areas was 1381. This was due to the fact that projects frequently focused upon more than one area.

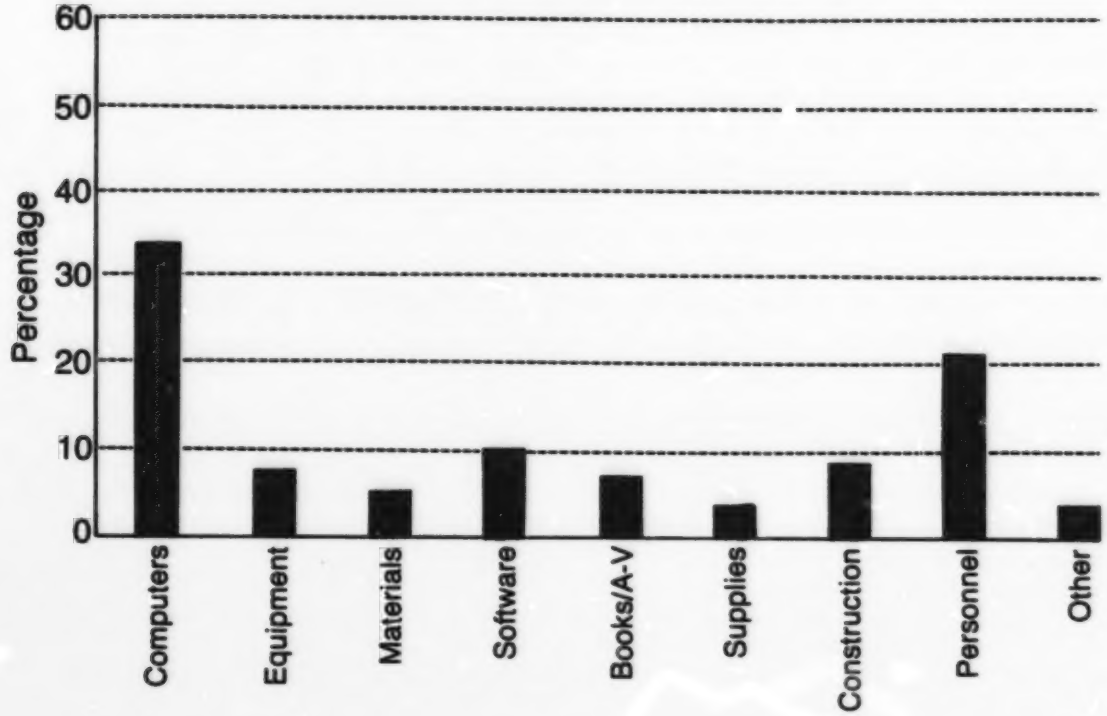
Table 2
EDF Projects 1985-86

Project areas	Number
Learning Resources	408
Efficiency Measures	188
Program Improvement Initiatives	785
• Teacher Inservice	77
• Gifted Students	104
• Dropout-Attendance	55
• Basic Skills	139
• Preparation for Life	107
• Use of Community Resources	54
• Directions	249
Total	**1,381**

Summary of Findings

It is not feasible to describe the impact of all Education Development Fund projects in detail. What follows is a general overview of the projects combining statistical information with actual evaluative comments from project leaders. This will provide the reader with sufficient data to estimate the provincial impact of EDF while allowing for insight as to its effect on local schools. EDF expenditures by expenditure area are contained in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Areas of EDF Expenditures



Learning Resources

The tools for learning are as many as they are varied. They differ according to the age of the student and the courses being taught. Without these tools the focus of learning and the means for learning become restricted in scope. The importance of these tools has always been recognized in the recorded history of education in this province. As early as 1907, one inspector of schools wrote:

> *Libraries are not as progressive as they should be. Probably in the future when people have greater wealth and when the struggle for existence is consequently less engrossing and when people have more leisure to read and to think, our school libraries will receive the attention that is their due.*

Seventy years later, during a review of curriculum and instruction in the province,students, educators, trustees, parents and the general public expressed concern about the resources available for students in schools. Many briefs and comments were solicited emphasizing the importance of up-to-date books and materials to support and encourage student learning. It was in response to these concerns that 25 percent of the Education Development Fund was devoted to learning resources that were used to deliver library services and give students access to computer technology.

During the first year of the fund, 408 projects dealt with the improvement of resources. School libraries have increased their holding of books by almost 20,000 volumes, filmstrip collections by 300, and have added substantial numbers of tables, shelves, chairs and other furniture to facilitate use of library services.

Reports to date indicate that libraries are being increasingly used by students.

> *In the majority of cases, our libraries now have students using them, whereas, in the past, they were used sparingly (Watrous).*

There have been reports of an increase of 2,000 loans per year and a 10% increase in circulation of curriculum-related material.

Substantial efforts have been made by these projects to provide students with access to the latest computer technology. This technology is essential for them to learn in order to more successfully enter the adult work world. More than 600 computers have been purchased, increasing the ratio of students to computers for some classrooms from 10:1 to 5:1. Software for students to use with these computers has risen by 15 to 20 percent due to the purchasing of programs, accessing programs remotely through modem communications, and entering into agreements with computer consortiums. Several projects have reported 30 to 50 percent increases in time that students have access to computers.

What is very clear in the reports received from schools is that computers make a difference in both the tone of a school and in the lives of individual students. For example, one project manager reported, "...not only the special education students, but also all the 600 students in the system benefit, due to the enthusiastic use of all the equipment by all the teachers on staff" (Yorkton).

Not only have Saskatchewan schools begun the task of renewing the physical aspects of their libraries and resource centres but they are also providing inservice training to teachers about how facilities should be used and maintained. In addition, personnel have been hired to take responsibility for the operation of resource centres. They include librarians, librarian-assistants, and support staff. In total, they number 78.

Efficiency Measures

"Getting more for less" is an ambitious goal. However, this is exactly what many of the 188 Education Development Fund efficiency projects were able to do in the 1985-86 school year. Through aggressively pursuing a program of energy conservation, projects have replaced or repaired windows, installed fans, repaired doors, changed lights and placed roll upon roll of insulation in walls or around pipes. These projects have made thousands of small changes to Saskatchewan schools. They are now reaping big savings and will reap even larger savings in the upcoming years. Findings of project leaders consistently concluded that these efforts were rewarded by lower energy costs.

> *...the cost of fuel compared to last year is substantially reduced. For example, a three month average fuel cost in 1985 was $1,3[illegible].38 as compared to $529.38 in 1986 (Arcola).*
>
> *Our objective of cutting fluorescent lighting costs in half has been met. Eight hundred dollar savings per month are now being realized (Prince Albert).*
>
> *...it appears that the savings to this point, ...will be approximately $1,897.97 for six months operation. If these calculations hold true for the balance of the year, the entire payback will be approximately thirty-three months (Humboldt).*

There is another very positive spinoff from energy conservation measures. Students and teachers now have a more comfortable working environment. This provides unmeasureable benefits in motivation, morale, attitude and respect for the school.

> *We went from a dingy appearance to a bright happy atmosphere (Grenfell).*
>
> *Students and teachers have both commented on the improved physical environment (Pilot Butte).*
>
> *The staff noticed a uniformity of temperature and comfort for students and staff (Wakaw).*
>
> *Students and staff report that they can now sit by the "windows" without freezing during the winter months (Mistatim).*

There have been major advances by school administrators in becoming more efficient. Emphasis has been upon using technology to make tasks simpler, faster, and more accurate while at the same time either cutting costs or making better use of time. All of this results in improved operation of schools.

Reports from project managers across the province suggest they are "very satisfied with the results" (Saskatoon). "Efficiency of school operation has improved" (Estevan) and what was once a "time consuming and tedious job, has now become a trivial task..." (Lloydminster). The modernization of office equipment has become a recognized time saver, "Wordprocessing is now a routine activity and we wouldn't be without it" (Outlook). "The impact of automation on certain office functions has been dramatic" (Saskatoon). Respect for the impact of computer technology on school administration was stressed by the following comments from a project manager in Eastend:

> *Beyond expectations--far more information is available--all budgets are broken down so that program costs can be determined by subject and grade.*

Program Improvement Initiatives

The majority of Education Development Fund projects focused upon the development of programs. The diversity of objectives combined with the richness of learning experiences provided by these projects have enhanced teacher and student expectations about what schools have to offer them and what they have to offer their schools.

Each project makes a unique contribution to the community it serves. Taken collectively, they enrich education in this province as few other programs have done.

Teacher Inservice

Opportunities have blossomed for more than 1,000 teachers to acquire greater knowledge and skill in promoting student learning. These opportunities include, among others, workshops on learning styles, discipline, individualizing instruction, supervision, computer technology, classroom management, gifted students and students with disabilities.

Oftentimes the learning occurred outside of normal school hours and on weekends.

> *Classroom instruction time was "saved" by holding two successful sessions on Saturdays instead of on school days (Yorkton).*

The response to these inservice opportunities has been positive. Reports to date suggest they have made an immediate impact upon the participants and upon students. One project leader wrote, "Principals left with a deeper insight in how to supervise and improve instruction" (Sturgis).

The intent of many of the inservice projects was echoed by a project leader in Melfort who stated:

> *Teachers are better able to provide programs ... beyond what was regularly in place previous to the time the Education Development Fund program was in place.*

Gifted Students

Gifted students can be described in many different ways. They are those individuals who have outstanding abilities or talents. These talents may be in areas such as music, science, sports, economics, drama, art or writing. To meet the needs of these students within the classroom setting requires imaginative teachers, good relations between home and school and access to enriching learning resources. These form the basis of many projects that focused upon gifted students in Saskatchewan.

The number of gifted students provided with new learning opportunities exceeded 1,800. These students have received more individual attention from teachers while pursuing the development of critical thinking skills, problem solving abilities and knowledge beyond what is contained in the curriculum.

These projects have spawned considerable optimism among educators, students and parents as to what can happen for gifted students in our province's schools. One project leader from Kamsack indicated that teachers, parents and students thought their project fostered a desire in gifted students to reach their potential.

Such positive findings occurred in many other parts of the province. For example, from Blaine Lake we heard, "It is ... meeting with success and approval by the general public," and from North Battleford it was stated that, "Facilitators, committee members and administrators regard the program as a success and are anxious to make required changes and expand according to the established plan."

Dropout and Attendance

Saskatchewan has a good record of encouraging students to stay in school. In the last ten years, the percentage of grade two students who eventually enrol in grade 12 has risen from the high 60's to the low 80's. The ideal of every student graduating from grade 12 is one shared by all educators, particularly those involved in projects designed to encourage students to choose school.

The means chosen to prevent students from dropping out were varied. They included remedial reading, tutors, computerizing attendance records, counselling, work experience, teacher inservice, diagnostic testing for learning problems, introduction to computer technology, and providing students with functional math skills.

In several instances, it is still too early to measure the full impact of the projects. Where information is available there appears to be considerable success. From Wadena it was reported:

- *There were no dropouts this year,*
- *Vandalism was very small in comparison to previous years,*
- *Grades in the Grade 10 room generally increased over the year.*

A project leader from Colonsay indicated, "A change in attitude has resulted with those students involved. This is evidenced by greater self-confidence, fewer behavior problems and improved attendance."

The project in Prince Albert at Carlton Comprehensive School with students of Native ancestry decreased the dropout rate from one semester to another by 10%, increased student daily attendance by 3% and increased student's self-esteem.

The provincial impact of projects such as these over the next five years should decrease the dropout rate by 2% to 4%. This would mean that hundreds more students will graduate from grade 12 than do presently. This higher graduation rate will have positive spinoffs for employment rates and participation in community life.

Basic Skills

I learned how to listen better.

I learned how to spell harder words.

I learned my basic math facts and it was fun.

I learned how to follow directions.

This student reaction from Weyburn sums up the impact of projects focusing upon the basic skills. Saskatchewan Education has long maintained the importance of basic skills and has studiously avoided any "bandwagon" that suggested they were not important. This determined focus has resulted in the education of students with basic skills second to none in all of Canada. Provincial testing programs in 1958, 1978, and in 1985 all showed that Saskatchewan students generally performed higher than average on standardized tests of basic skills. The projects that are ongoing now and those to be implemented in upcoming months will ensure our students will continue to excell.

Part of the success we have in teaching the basic skills is due to a well-trained teaching force that is sensitive to the needs of each student. Consequently, students are motivated and want to learn. This is implied by one project leader who wrote:

> *Their writing skills are excellent... Furthermore, we had a relaxed and joyful year where everyone learned to love reading and writing (Spiritwood).*

Preparation for Life

Developing awareness of career opportunities and interests in different vocational areas are two very important goals of education in Saskatchewan. Several projects have used computer technology to give students access to career-related information. The use of the computer allows students to find and retrieve relevant career data more quickly than was previously possible. Rather than a customary two to three week wait for information, it can be obtained in minutes. In the first year of operation, these projects have reached approximately 2,200 students. Several project leaders indicated that the long-term effects have yet to be determined, but short-term gains have been made. Such gains are reported by a project in Sturgis:

> *Students appreciated the opportunity to explore ... on their own and to discover their own potential.*

In Rockglen one project indicated the following benefits when using a computer program:

> *Students discover that a less than grade 12 severely restricts the career possibilities. This then encourages them to remain in school.*

Not all projects having the goal of preparing students for life enlisted the aid of computer technology. Several utilized counselling, educational testing, work-experience, and self-improvement programs. One activity in Prince Albert actually had special education students practicing independent living skills in an apartment. They spent one hour a day doing activities like cleaning rooms, buying food, preparing food, and making the bed. "The care of the apartment has become a matter of pride with them." Parents and guardians are noticing, "a greater awareness and assistance at home by the students."

Use of Community Resources

Wise use of community resources breathes life into schools as well as stimulates the community. The 54 projects that focused upon community resources did so for many reasons. These included, among others, gathering public information about educational goals and programs, encouraging greater understanding among cultural groups, staff improvement, student awareness of career opportunities and generating student interest in the world around them. These varying objectives were achieved through public meetings, committee work, special events, community projects and visitations. Reactions have been very promising.

> *The Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction is excellent. Teachers and parents in my school are excited about their involvement (Swift Current).*
>
> *We took our grade two's and three's on a full day trip to Moose Jaw. In my years of teaching experience I can't remember ever having such a rewarding excursion with a class! (Regina).*

It is impossible to accurately estimate how many people's lives have been touched by these projects. Most certainly, it runs into the thousands.

Directions

The recommendations contained in *Directions*, the final report of the Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction, stimulated many project proposals. One project leader in North Battleford wrote:

> *...our project faltered somewhat until more expertise, more assistance, and more funds were made available. The $3,000.00 we received from the Education Development Fund provided the solution to these problems (North Battleford).*

In this instance, 80 students could continue their work in preparing a Television Day surrounding the events of 1885 in the Battlefords. Projects like this indicate that with the addition of funds there can be a growth in programs in Saskatchewan schools.

These projects have achieved such diverse objectives as improving staff-parent relations, increasing school effectiveness, providing remedial programs, assisting special education students, developing alternative programs, creating enrichment centers, and heightening awareness of aesthetics in the school. Many of these projects tended to involve small groups of people but had a large impact.

As a result of a guitar program in Ile a la Crosse:

> *Eight students with no or little previous expertise in guitar playing are now able to master the basics of the instrument and are learning to read music. Knowledge of local music and songs and their place in the culture of the community has increased.*

A portable science laboratory in the Creighton school division has been found to be a, "More efficient delivery ... for maximum participation by students" while in Warman a traveling art exhibit, "... was given many positive comments and was a very high profile event for our (19) schools."

Summary

Results of the Education Development Fund projects completed during the first year of operation are very encouraging. Careful planning and wise use of resources has provided students, teachers and parents with opportunities that previously never existed. The continuation of this plan through the next few years will lay a strong foundation for the growth of education in this province. This growth will nurture excellence in teaching, foster greater student learning and better prepare students for adult life.